



Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 22 | Issue 1

Article 32

February 2021

Haile, Resa, and, Bower, Tamara R. (Eds.). (2019). Villains, Victims, and Violets: Agency and Feminism in the Original Sherlock Holmes Canon. BrownWalker Press. Paperback. 316 pages.

Billy Tringali
Emory University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tringali, Billy (2021). Haile, Resa, and, Bower, Tamara R. (Eds.). (2019). Villains, Victims, and Violets: Agency and Feminism in the Original Sherlock Holmes Canon. BrownWalker Press. Paperback. 316 pages.. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), 534-535.
Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss1/32>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

Haile, Resa, and, Bower, Tamara R. (Eds.). (2019). *Villains, Victims, and Violets: Agency and Feminism in the Original Sherlock Holmes Canon*. BrownWalker Press. Paperback. 316 pages.

Reviewed by Billy Tringaliⁱ

Across its thirty-two chapters, *Villains, Victims, and Violets: Agency and Feminism in the Original Sherlock Holmes Canon* analyzes women and their actions as presented in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes canon. The more than two dozen women included in *Villains, Victims, and Violets: Agency and Feminism in the Original Sherlock Holmes Canon* are authors of mystery novels and short stories, previous contributors to other Sherlockian anthologies, members or founders of Holmesian societies, and, above all else, fans of Sherlock Holmes. This book is touted on its cover as a "Studious Scarlets Society Anthology". The Studious Scarlets are, according to their webpage, "an online group of women writers of Sherlockian fiction and nonfiction. We are an official scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars."ⁱⁱ Though the love of the Sherlock Holmes canon is clear, admiration of these works does not stop these authors from taking a critical eye at Holmes', Watson's, and ultimately Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's descriptions and depictions of women across all the original, Sherlock Holmes novels.

There, firstly, are two, notably overarching critiques that must be made of *Villains, Victims, and Violets*. The essays present are short and quickly consumed, more easily compared to commentary on a book than a densely academic, heavily footnoted, jargon ridden paper. This stands as both a blessing and a curse for *Villains, Victims, and Violets*. On the one hand, these short pieces, some only six pages long, are incredibly readable. The lack of jargon would make them perfect for an undergraduate searching for inspiration regarding a paper for a Victorian Literature course, or a fan of Sherlock Holmes looking to see how other fan-scholars engage with analysis of the presentation of women in the Victorian Era through the eyes of the members of the all-women's *Studious Scarlets Society*. This is, without question, an anthology created by fans of Sherlock Holmes, for fans of Sherlock Holmes, and with this author counting himself among that lot, combined with the shorter length of the essays included, this is a very easy book to read and enjoy. But because of the size of each article, with the longest chapter being only fourteen pages ("The Lady was a Charming Correspondent"), no single chapter can truly go into an in-depth analysis of the topics they raise. This is not necessarily a negative, simply meaning that this book fits best on the shelf of a fan looking for greater insight into the Holmes canon.

My largest critique of *Villains, Victims, and Violets* is that none of the chapters contain footnotes, endnotes, or formal in-text citations to any of the research they are often referencing. There are no official citations to any articles, authors, or other works. There is, at the very end of the anthology, a bibliography that contains official citations of works mentioned throughout the entirety of *Villains, Victims, and Violets*, but they are not attributed to the chapters in which they are mentioned, respectively. This reduces the academic quality of the articles within *Villains, Victims, and Violets*, which may make some researchers hesitant to cite the works it contains, and some professors hesitant to assign the chapters within it to their students. This is not a critique of the quality of the arguments made by the authors of these chapters, but it stands as a stark break from normative academic publishing and lessens the impact of the academic voice each author of

this anthology attempts to invoke. This absence of footnotes or endnotes can also be frustrating to researchers interested in digging deeper in the works mentioned by various authors. The latter was realized by this author when he lost his place after jumping to the bibliography and had to rescan the anthology attempting to remember which chapter mentioned a CDC study on binge drinking.

That this lack of citation diminishing the academic tone of these authors is tragic to note, as every chapter makes great pains to reference sources relating to the topics they are engaging with. In her five-page chapter “‘She Blessed the Hand’: The Case of the Defiant Daughter”, author Sonia Fetherston gives brief but fascinating commentary on alcoholism in the Victorian era, supported by modern research by the CDC and historical accounts by the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth (31, 32). In her “Still Waters Run Deviant: The Scheming Librarian”, Liese Sherwood-Fabre references two texts concerning the archetypes of the “Librarian” and the “Schemer” (247). And in her piece, “‘The Lady was a Charming Correspondent’: Chivalry, Cigars, and the Avenging Angel of ‘The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton’”, Mary Platt references several texts on Victorian women’s daily life and societal treatment, including a reference to John Stuart Mill’s essay “The Subjection of Women”, which is notably left out of the book’s bibliography. None of this is information the average fan of Sherlock Holmes would have ready knowledge of, and when presented alongside an analysis of the canon’s female characters, it certainly stands that this anthology is adding a unique voice.

Each of the chapters within this book focus on engaging with various stories, characters, and tropes present in the works across the Sherlock Holmes canon created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Flush with block quotes by Dr. Watson, and often including descriptions of the plots of the stories they discuss, chapters which focus on comparing multiple works by Doyle can be read without prior knowledge to each and every line of the Holmes canon, but chapters that focus more narrowly on one to two stories are best read in conversation with Doyle’s works.

As a piece of larger literature regarding Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the Holmes canon, this anthology stands unique as being made up entirely of women, and having each chapter focus on the women present within the canon of Sherlock Holmes. This new voice on this subject is especially important reclamation according to the author of the book’s Forward, Nisi Shawl, who notes “Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was not a feminist.” (xi). To have so many women that are fans of the Holmes canon writing about women in the Holmes canon is a massively valuable voice made heard by the publication of this text.

Villains, Victims, and Violets is a Sherlockian anthology series written by fans of Sherlock Holmes, and for fans of Sherlock Holmes. From its discussions of alcoholism in the Sherlock Holmes canon (“She Blessed the Hand”), to humorous reminders of ‘acceptable’ methods by which women could defend themselves in the Holmes canon era (“A Canonical Lady’s Guide to Defense Against Abuse and Blackmail”), various chapters of *Villains, Victims, and Violets* would make for excellent assigned reading to an undergraduate class on Gothic literature, Victorian literature, or Sherlock Holmes, and would sit well on the bookshelf of any fan of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s ingenious detective.

ⁱ Billy Tringali is the Law Librarian for Outreach at Emory University School of Law. He holds Bachelor’s of Arts from Bridgewater State University in English and Anthropology, and a Master’s of Science in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

ⁱⁱ Studios Scarlet Society. (N.d.). *Home*. The Studios Scarlets Society. <https://www.studiousscarlets.com/>